

AGENDA: April 27, 2004

7.1

CATEGORY: Items Initiated by Council

DEPT.: City Council

TITLE: Development of Rowhouse Guidelines

RECOMMENDATION

Direct staff to develop a reasonably low-impact plan to develop guidelines to allow rowhouses to be built in R3 zoned areas at condominium densities for review in conjunction with the second City Council goal-setting workshop on May 11, 2004.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact to developing a plan. Any fiscal or staffing impact would be reviewed in conjunction with the options for developing the new guidelines.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Currently, townhomes are allowed in the R3 Zoning District, but only at roughly half of the density of condominiums or apartments. Townhomes are allowed at a FAR of .55 while condominiums are allowed at a FAR of 1.05.

The original reason for this distinction was that some townhome projects were built with a boxy feel with facades consisting primarily of garage doors.

Since then, the City has seen denser townhome-like projects which deal with the garage door problem through better design. One example is the Victorian townhomes at Villa and Bryant Streets which place the parking underneath the units. Another example is attached homes at Whisman Station, which place the garages off of common alleys—behind the units. Both projects are generally seen as very attractive and are built at about a 1.0 FAR. These projects were possible only because they took place in precise plans. Had the zoning been R3, each would have had to have roughly half the floor space to be built as townhomes.

This proposal would define a rowhouse as similar to a townhome, except that the parking is behind or below the unit instead of in front of the unit. Rowhouses would then be allowed at condominium densities.

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Development of rowhouse guidelines is currently on the Housing Element implementation list and is expected to have significant interest for builders. Housing Element implementation is one of the main items for this year's goal setting.

For purposes of discussion, I am using rowhouse to mean attached housing with parking either behind or beneath the unit. This is different from townhomes, which generally have a garage in front of the unit, as seen in the 233 Granada project.

At least for the initial study, I am not proposing that we limit rowhouses to any particular size of lot. Based on the success of the two projects on Bryant Street, I believe we can make this work on relatively small parcels. The initial scoping would have minimal staff impact. Initial conversations with staff indicate that options could be developed in time for the May 11 goal-setting meeting.

The amount of work to develop guidelines would depend on the direction of the Council. If the Council wishes to develop a new set of design guidelines that could be done for roughly \$15,000 and 150 to 200 staff-hours (these are preliminary estimates subject to confirmation in the recommended report), the money would be used to hire an architect to draw up examples to see what actual designs might come forward under a proposed set of rules.

The alternative would be to define rowhouses and allow rowhouses under the existing apartment and condominium guidelines. This could require some minor clarifications. For example, the condominium guidelines specify large setbacks between buildings. If we allow rowhouses, the guidelines would need to be clarified to say that the setback is between blocks of rowhouses rather than individual rowhouses.

One difference between the alternative is that a better design set for guidelines could be easier to administer and could save significant staff time in processing applications.

In either case, the staff impact could be limited by choosing a process which allows the staff to streamline the process to the greatest extent feasible.

PUBLIC NOTICING—Agenda posting.

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